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News Release



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U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service Prepares for 2006 Fire Season

In a directive issued June 22, 2006, the U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service (Service) instructed employees in California and Nevada to notify land management agencies and local fire authorities of the Service's wildfire response priorities. In emergency situations the Service's first concern is always for public safety.

"When a wildfire occurs, where endangered or threatened species are involved, fire responders do not need to delay emergency responses," said Steve Thompson, U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service California and Nevada Operation Manager. "Our approach is to do everything possible to assist in safeguarding our firefighters, people and communities."

The fire conditions throughout the western United States present a high probability of a significant fire season. Service personnel are actively coordinating with the U.S. Forest Service, Tribes, Bureau of Land Management, National Park Service, California Department of Forestry, Nevada Department of Forestry, county officials and others, in order to clarify the Service's priorities and expedite the ESA consultation process for emergency situations. The Service will follow the emergency consultation process as detailed in Section 7 of the Endangered Species Act (ESA), which states that formal consultation shall be initiated as soon as practicable after the emergency is under control.

In addition to providing consultations on endangered and threatened species, the Service has a long-standing role in fire prevention, hazardous fuels reduction, fire preparedness and response. The Service recently completed its annual fire readiness reviews of all fire personnel located at many of the National Wildlife Refuges throughout California and Nevada. Fire staff completed training, prepared fire equipment and apparatus and enhanced communications with interagency and local fire authorities.

The Service's hazardous fuels reduction projects include prescribed burning, mechanical treatments, and biological treatments such as grazing. These projects are designed to reduce hazardous levels of vegetation and nonnative species, increase defensible space, enhance habitat and protect communities and property from catastrophic wildfire. To read the directive or learn more about the Service's fire program in California and Nevada please visit <http://www.fws.gov/cno/fire/>.

The U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service is the principal Federal agency responsible for conserving, protecting and enhancing fish, wildlife and plants and their habitats for the continuing benefit of the American people. The Service manages the 95-million-acre National Wildlife Refuge System which encompasses 544 national wildlife refuges, thousands of small wetlands and other special management areas. It also operates 69 national fish hatcheries, 63 fishery resource offices and 81 ecological services field stations. The agency enforces Federal wildlife laws, administers the Endangered Species Act, manages migratory bird populations, restores nationally significant fisheries, conserves and restores wildlife habitat such as wetlands, and helps foreign governments with their conservation efforts. It also oversees the Federal Aid program that distributes hundreds of millions of dollars in excise taxes on fishing and hunting equipment to State fish and wildlife agencies.